

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT
CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PLAN

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

**Citizen Participation Plan
State of Alabama
Consolidated Submission for Community Planning and Development Programs**

Adoption of Citizen Participation Plan

In accordance with 24 CFR Part 91 91.115 (a), the State of Alabama herewith amends its existing Citizen Participation Plan adopted in accordance with Section 104 (a) (3) of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974. Said amendment will become effective on December 12, 1997 upon compliance with all requirements of applicable laws.

Comments on the Citizen Participation Plan and Amendments

Citizen Participation is strongly encouraged in the development of all elements of the Consolidated Plan, any substantial amendments to the Plan elements and the Performance Reports. This shall be accomplished through public hearings in times and places accessible to low and moderate-income residents and through coordination of data and people from various agencies representative of affected citizens. All materials and meetings will be accessible to non- English speaking persons and minorities, as well as, upon request, persons of disabilities.

The Citizen Participation Plan, as well as any amendments to that plan, will be presented for review and comment in a statewide public hearing. Chief elected officials, citizens groups, and citizens will be notified by mail of the hearing. The hearing will also be advertised in major newspapers of general circulation. Upon request it will be provided in a format accessible to disabled persons.

Development of the Consolidated Plan and Plan Elements

The State will make available to citizens, public agencies, and other interested parties information that includes the amount of assistance the State expects to receive and the range of activities that may be undertaken. This shall include the estimated amount that will benefit persons of low and moderate-income as well as plans to minimize displacement of persons and to assist any persons displaced. This will be accomplished through a statewide advertisement in the nonlegal section of one or more newspapers of general circulation. Notices will also be sent to chief elected officials of local governments, state agencies, and other interested parties.

The State will publish a Summary of the proposed Plan in one or more newspapers of general circulation. It will also make copies of the proposed plan available at libraries, government offices and public places. The Summary will describe the contents and purpose of the Plan and will include a list of locations where copies of the entire proposed Plan may be examined. The State will also provide a reasonable number of free copies of the plan to citizens and groups that request it.

The State will conduct at least one public hearing on housing and community development needs before the proposed Plan is published for comment. The State will publish a notice of the hearing in the nonlegal section of one or more newspapers of general circulation two weeks prior to conducting the hearing. The Notice will include adequate information to permit citizen comments on housing and community development needs.

The hearing will be held at a public facility accessible to persons of low and moderate-income, as well as persons of disabilities. Time will be determined based on previous attendance. Non English speaking persons will be asked to contact the State if an interpreter is needed. Should a significant number of requests result, then an interpreter will be provided.

The State will receive comments on the proposed Consolidated Plan for a period of 30 days. The state will consider any comments or views of citizens and units of general government received in writing or orally at the public hearing, in preparing the final Plan. A summary of these comments or views will be included in the final Plan. Reasons will be given for comments or views not accepted.

Amendments

The State will make every effort to obtain viable citizen input when program amendments are made which substantially impact the program. In such cases a public hearing will be held and Notices will be given through the nonlegal section of at least four newspapers of general circulation. Two weeks notice will be given for a public hearing and a 30 day comment period will be provided.

The State will consider all comments or views and will give reasons for those not accepted. A summary will be attached to the final amendment.

Substantial amendments are viewed as those which alter the Action Plan elements in one of the following ways:

- 1. Add or delete funding categories;*
- 2. Change evaluation criteria;*
- 3. Change thresholds for eligibility;*
- 4. Change grant ceilings or minimums; or*
- 5. Shift money from one fund category to another so that the cumulative shift is greater than 5 percent of the state allocation, except that in the HOPWA Program budget, line item shifts of up to 10 percent may be made without being viewed as substantial amendments.*

Amendments not covered by the thresholds above may be made at the discretion of the State and notice will be given through normal programmatic communications to elected officials and other persons having an interest in HUD Action Plan programs.

Similarly, funds recaptured from current or prior program years will be directed to the Fund deemed appropriate by the State, and allocated according to the Action Plan criteria in effect at the time of the allocation.

Performance Reports

The State will provide citizens with an opportunity to comment on Performance Reports. A notice will be published in the nonlegal section of one or more newspapers of general circulation that the report is available for review and comment. A reasonable number of copies will be provided to citizens upon request. Locations where copies can be reviewed will be stated. A fifteen day comment period will be provided. A summary of comments will be attached to the report.

Citizen Participation Requirements for Local Governments

The following will serve as the State's citizen participation requirements for units of general local government receiving CDBG funds from the State in accordance with 24 CFR 570.486.

The primary goal of a community's Citizen Participation Plan will be to provide all citizens of the community with an adequate opportunity to participate in an advisory role in the planning, implementation, and assessment of the community's Action Plan programs. The Plan shall set forth policies and procedures for citizen participation which are designed to maximize the opportunity for citizen participation in the community development process. Special emphasis will be placed on encouraging participation by persons of low and moderate-incomes, residents of blighted neighborhoods, and residents of areas where community development funds are utilized.

Citizens will be encouraged to participate in all phases of the CDBG Program(s) and will be provided full access to program information. Local officials will make every effort to involve citizens in all phases of the development, **implementation and assessment of** community development programs including, but not limited to the following phases:

- a. Identification and assessment of housing and community development needs;
- b. Determination of CDBG projects and the development of CDBG applications;
- c. Changes and/or amendments to approved CDBG projects; and
- d. Assessment of CDBG program performance.

All phases of the community development process will be conducted by local officials in an open manner. Citizens of the community will be encouraged to participate at all

levels and will be given access to program information during each phase of any CDBG program as outlined herein. Communities shall provide technical assistance to individual citizens and citizen groups, especially low and moderate-income groups.

Citizen participation in the community development process will be conducted on a community wide basis and will actively involve the views and proposals of all citizens, especially low and moderate-income persons and residents of areas where CDBG activities are proposed or ongoing. Public hearings will be held during all phases of the community development process to allow citizens to voice opinions and offer proposals concerning the development and performance of CDBG programs. All public hearings will be held at times and locations which will be accessible to all citizens, especially persons of low and moderate-incomes and residents of blighted neighborhoods and CDBG project areas.

Public hearings will be scheduled for convenient times as determined by the local governing body. Public hearings may be held at any site which, in the opinion of the community provides adequate access for citizens to participate.

At least one hearing shall be held during any CDBG program fiscal year prior to the submission of an application to ADECA for CDBG assistance. The primary purposes of the hearing shall be to assess community needs and problems in an effort to determine the most critical needs to be addressed by the CDBG program; and also to present, for public comment and review, the program activities which have been selected by the community to resolve the identified needs.

Citizens will be provided with information concerning the CDBG program at this hearing. Such information shall include, but not necessarily be limited to: the goals and objectives of the CDBG program; the total amount of CDBG funds available; the role of citizens in program planning, implementation, and assessment; the range of activities which may be undertaken; the process to be followed in developing an application; the application timetables; the application rating process; the schedule of meetings and hearings; activities previously funded in the community through the CDBG program; and, an identification of projects which could result in the relocation of area residents or businesses, and the actions that would be undertaken if such relocation were necessary.

Communities will assure the opportunity for citizen participation during the implementation of any CDBG programs when changes to the project are under consideration by the community. Citizen participation shall be obtained and considered in any amendments to a CDBG program which involves changes in dollar amounts spent on any activity, changes in program beneficiaries, changes in the location of approved activities and major budget shifts between approved activities.

To ensure adequate opportunity for citizen participation during CDBG programs, the community shall hold a public hearing on all formal amendments which require ADECA approval. For local amendments(as defined by ADECA)and changes for which ADECA

approval is not required, input from citizens concerning the changes may be received at regularly scheduled local governing body meetings where such changes or amendments are considered.

Citizens of communities will be provided with the opportunity to comment on the performance of local officials, the community's staff, consultants, engineers and contractors, and the actual use of CDBG funds during the implementation of CDBG program. Citizens will also be requested to assess the performance of the community in addressing identified community development and housing needs, and to assess the performance in achieving its goals and objectives in those areas. On going community assessment of the effectiveness of the process is considered essential to the success of the CDBG program.

At the conclusion of each CDBG project, a hearing will be held to review program activities and to assess program performance. This hearing shall be held prior to the submission of the PAR and any other required closeout documents to ADECA for a CDBG project. This required hearing will be used to ensure community wide participation in the evaluation of the CDBG program.

Other hearings may be held as deemed necessary by the community in order to inform citizens of community development projects and activities, and to solicit citizen opinion and comments. All additional hearings shall comply with the requirements set forth in this Plan.

Should a significant number of non-English speaking persons move into the community or participate in public hearings, local officials will undertake reasonable actions to facilitate their participation in the community development process. Such actions may include the provision of an interpreter when needed and provision of materials in the appropriate language or format.

Notice of public hearings will be published in a newspaper of general circulation in the locality at least seven days prior to the hearing date. The community may waive hearing notice requirements in cases where unusual circumstances justify alternative means of notifying the general public. In such cases, shorter notice may be given, and public notices posted in public places may be used in place of a notice published in a newspaper. Each notice of a hearing shall include the time, date, place and topics and procedures to be discussed. Notices for public hearings may be run or posted, separately or together, as may be deemed necessary by the governing body.

The procedures outlined herein are designed to promote participation by low and moderate-income citizens, as well as residents of blighted areas and CDBG project neighborhoods in any public hearing(s). Local officials may take additional steps to further promote participation by such groups, or to target program information to these persons should officials feel that such people may otherwise be excluded, or should additional action be deemed necessary. Activities to promote additional participation may include: posting of notices in blighted neighborhoods and in places frequented by

low and moderate-income persons, and holding public hearings in low and moderate-income neighborhoods or areas of existing or proposed CDBG project activities.

The locations of all hearings as described herein shall be made accessible to the handicapped. Also, the community shall provide a sign language interpreter whenever the community is notified in advance that one or more deaf persons will be in attendance.

Citizens will be provided full access to CDBG program information during all phases of the project. Local officials of the community shall make a reasonable effort to assure that CDBG program information is available to all citizens, especially those of low and moderate-incomes and those in project areas.

CDBG program information and materials concerning specific projects will be available and distributed to the public at regularly scheduled hearings. Materials to be made available shall include, but are not limited to: The Citizen Participation Plan; records of hearings, mailings and promotional materials, prior CDBG program applications; letters of approval; grant agreements; the environmental review record; financial and procurement records; project design and construction specifications; performance and evaluation reports; other reports required by ADECA; proposed and approved CDBG applications for the current year or project; written comments or complaints received concerning the program, and written responses from the community; and, copies of the applicable federal and state rules, regulations, policies, requirements and procedures governing the CDBG program.

The public hearings scheduled, as described in the Plan, are designed to facilitate public participation in all phases of the community development process. Citizens are encouraged to submit their views and proposals on all aspects of a community development program at the hearings. However, to ensure that citizens are given the opportunity to assess and comment on all aspects of the community development program on a continuous basis, citizens may at any time submit written comments or complaints to the community.

Any citizen or citizens group desiring to comment or object to any phase of the planning, development, or approval of the application for CDBG funds, or to the implementation of any CDBG program, should submit such comments or objections in writing to the chief elected official. Should, after a reasonable period, a party believe that his comment or complaint has not been properly addressed or considered by the elected official, then the aggrieved party may appeal their case to the local governing body.

Local officials shall make every effort to provide written responses to citizen proposals or complaints within fifteen working days of the receipt of such comments where practicable. Should the local governing body be unable to resolve an objection or complaint, it may be forwarded by the aggrieved party to ADECA.

Citizens may, at any time, contact ADECA and HUD directly to register comments, objections or complaints concerning the community's CDBG application and program. Citizens are encouraged, however, to attempt to resolve complaints at the local level as outlined above prior to contacting ADECA or HUD.

Records of all comments, objections and/or complaints by the citizens concerning the community's CDBG program and subsequent action taken in response to those comments shall be maintained on file at the local government's office and shall be made available for public inspection upon request.

The communities may, from time to time, modify the provisions of their Citizen Participation Plan. It shall be the policy of the community to periodically review and discuss the effectiveness of the Plan in allowing citizen participation in the community development process and in helping to meet the community development needs and goals identified by the citizens. To this end, the effectiveness of the Plan will be discussed at the public hearings held in conjunction with the community development program as discussed herein, and potential amendments to the Plan will be reviewed at this time.

Amendments to the Plan will be made as necessary. All amendments shall be approved by resolution of the local governing body and shall be incorporated into this Plan.

Availability to the Public

The Consolidated Plan, Citizen Participation Plan and substantial amendments will be made available to the public through copies provided at regularly scheduled public hearings throughout the process. Copies will also be provided in reasonable numbers to citizens and to associations representing citizens upon request. These materials will also be made available in a format accessible to persons with disabilities upon request.

Access to Records

Citizens, public agencies, and other interested parties may have access to public information, documents and records during regularly scheduled working hours of the agencies administering the affected programs.

Complaints

The State will provide a substantive written response to every written complaint concerning the consolidated Plan, Citizen Participation Plan, Amendments, and Performance Reports within fifteen working days where practicable.